



'WE NEED MORE ACTION' SAY UNIVERSITY STRIKERS

UCU UNION MEMBERS SPEAK OUT AFTER 50,000 JOIN
THREE DAYS OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION >>Page 20



SOLIDARITY ON
THE SHORES OF
SUSSEX
>>Pages 10&11

Socialist Worker

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18 DECEMBER 2020 DOWNING STREET
PARTY AS 514 COVID DEATHS REPORTED

THE TORIES PARTIED AS PEOPLE DIED



LAWS

New Tory drug policies won't smoke out rich

THE GOVERNMENT'S new drug strategy for England and Wales gives the police more powers to hand harsher punishments to drug users.

Niamh Eastwood of the think tank Release said, "Britain is going backwards, embracing a 'war on drugs' approach."

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ENVIRONMENT



Keep up the pressure on Cambo oil field

ENVIRONMENTAL activists forced multinational oil company Shell to stop the Cambo oil field proposals in the North Sea.

But the battle isn't over yet. Energy company Siccar Point, which owns a significant stake in the project, has said it could go ahead without Shell's backing.

>>Page 4

LIBERATION

Revolutionary life and politics of Steve Biko

BORN 75 years ago this month, Steve Biko was one of South Africa's most important activists. Yet he is barely mentioned in many history books. Biko's struggles and revolutionary politics are still crucial for activists today.

>>Pages 14&15



THE THINGS THEY SAY

'See nothing, hear nothing, say nothing'

From the manual Ghislaine Maxwell wrote for staff working at Jeffrey Epstein's Florida home

'This political drift and lack of leadership is prolonging the pandemic for everyone. There have been wonderful speeches, warm words, but not the actions needed'

Sir Jeremy Farrar, the director of the Wellcome Trust

'Frankly in a mess'

What Caroline Abrahams, charity director at Age UK, said of the programme for booster vaccine jabs for care homes

'This will not be the last time a virus threatens our lives. The truth is the next one could be worse'

Prof Sarah Gilbert, one of the creators of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine



Tories sell off vaccine maker as firms make £50,000 a minute

A FLAGSHIP vaccine manufacturing centre that has supposedly been at the heart of the government's efforts to prepare for future pandemics is now up for sale to private pharma firms.

It previously received more than £200 million of public funding.

Several companies have submitted bids for the Vaccine Manufacturing Innovation Centre (Vmfc) at Harwell, near Oxford.

The government announced the creation of the Vmfc in 2018 to develop and make vaccines as part of efforts to deal with future epidemics.

The centre had been scheduled for completion in 2023 but at the height of

the Covid-19 pandemic the date was brought forward to spring 2022.

RECENT figures from the People's Vaccine Alliance reveal that companies behind two of the most successful COVID-19 vaccines—Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna—are making combined profits of £50,000 every minute.

The Alliance estimates that Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna will make pre-tax profits of £26 billion this year between them. That works out as nearly £1,000 a second, £50,000 a minute or £71 million a day.

Pfizer last week more than doubled its forecast for Covid-19 vaccine sales this year compared with its

initial estimates and predicted bumper revenues in 2022.

The company said last week that it expected to generate £27.5 billion in sales this year and £22 billion in 2022.

Albert Bourla, the chief executive of Pfizer, described the call to share vaccine technology with poorer countries "dangerous nonsense".

RETAILERS ARE continuing to put up fuel prices when they should reduce them in line with savings in wholesale oil prices, the RAC motoring services organisation has claimed. In response to concerns about the Omicron variant, oil prices fell by around £7.50 a barrel last week.

But this has not been reflected at the pumps. Retailers added on average another 3.1p to a litre of unleaded petrol and 2.7p to diesel in November.

In particular, the RAC pointed the finger at supermarket chains who are major fuel retailers who had increased prices "unnecessarily".

Fuelling price rises

WHILE VOMITING up a column in The Sun defending streets named after slave owners, Rod Liddle digressed to share his views on Labour's new shadow ministers. He praised Yvette Cooper as a "talented politician" and Wes Streeting as "no fool". But David Lammy is a "lumox" who knows less about foreign affairs than a pack of Pringles. Trouble Maker wonders what it is about David Lammy that Liddle doesn't like.

Grenfell survivors call for Hamilton to drop sponsor

FORMULA 1 driver Lewis Hamilton is facing protests from Grenfell survivors over the deal that saw his car emblazoned with Kingspan's company logo.

This is one of the firms that made combustible insulation used on the tower.

Hamilton used the logo at last weekend's Saudi Arabia Grand Prix.

Kingspan made some of the insulation used on the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, which caught fire on 14 June 2017, killing 72 people.

Survivors of the disaster and bereaved relatives demanded the Mercedes-AMG Petronas Formula One team drop

the sponsorship deal. The survivors' group Grenfell United said in a letter last week to the team boss, Toto Wolff, "Kingspan played a central role in inflicting the pain and suffering that we feel today, and there must be a degree of public censure for Kingspan's recklessness."

Hamilton has previously supported Grenfell survivors in a message on Instagram.

Don't judge some by the company they keep

LORD CHIEF Justice Ian Burnett, the judge that will soon decide whether Julian Assange is extradited to the US, is a close personal friend of Sir Alan Duncan.

As foreign minister, Duncan arranged Assange's eviction from the Ecuadorian embassy.

The two have known each other since their student days at Oxford in the 1970s.

As a minister, Duncan called Assange a "miserable little worm" in parliament in March 2018. In his diaries,

Duncan refers to the "supposed human rights of Julian Assange."

Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, faces life imprisonment in the US for publishing secrets about US imperialism that had been bravely revealed by Chelsea Manning.

Cop not a racist

A POLICE sergeant accused of making racist comments in a pub has been cleared of misconduct after he explained he was talking about the "All Blacks" rugby side.

PS Paul Robinson was allegedly overheard making racist comments in a pub in 2019.

Freelance journalist Ed Clowes told the panel that Robinson said that "there were so few black football managers because they were lazy and thick". Clowes claimed Robinson spoke about "shithole Africa" and "the Africans being better off under colonial rule versus independence".

He earlier told the hearing that Robinson's repeated use of the term "threes"—a police classification for a black person.

Clowes said Robinson referenced talked about the Grenfell Fire. "He said if it had been Asians they would have left, if it had been whites they would have left.

"He then said that the threes were thick and didn't think for themselves."

Giving evidence Robinson said he was "absolutely not" a racist. When asked if it was possible that he used the term "lazy and thick" Robinson said, "Yes in the All Blacks performance against England." A disciplinary panel found that he did not make the alleged comments.

...and neither is this forgetful peer

THE conservative peer Michelle Mone stands accused of sending a racist message to a man of Indian heritage who alleged in an official complaint that she told him he was "a waste of a man's white skin".

The phrase was allegedly used in a WhatsApp message sent by the Tory member of the House of Lords in June 2019.

The message was part of a series of WhatsApp exchanges, screenshots of which have been sent to the House of Lords commissioner for standards.

It is part of a complaint alleging that Lady Mone sent racist and abusive messages. A representative of the Tory peer initially said, "Baroness Mone is 100 percent not a racist. Baroness Mone and her husband have built over 15 schools in Africa in the past three years." Her lawyers later provided another statement in which they said Mone had "no access" to the messages and no "detailed memory of them".

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Issues behind the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes

by AN EMERGENCY DUTY TEAM
SOCIAL WORKER

THE ACCOUNT of the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes is harrowing in the extreme. To be exposed to the details of such suffering and cruelty to this little boy makes it difficult to comprehend how anyone could treat a child in such a manner.

There is a genuine and rightful sense of shock. In these circumstances, politicians and media outlets of every type demand justice and to find out who is to blame.

Tory MPs are quick to say "Social services should not be let off the hook".

While no agency involved in child protection should be absolved of scrutiny it is noticeable that the police already appear to have fallen off the media scrutiny.

This is despite being cited as one of the agencies which had significant information passed to them.

What motivated the individuals who murdered Arthur may never really be known.

A matter of individual behaviour always has a number of individual issues as well as social questions that shape how they act.

People can act in very different ways even in what seem to be similar circumstances.

However, there is a price to pay for huge cuts to local authorities' budgets which include child protection responsibilities.

This happened in the context of a decade and more of increased poverty.

Now 36 percent of all children from families with a child under five in Britain now live on or below the poverty line—rising to 48 percent for black children.

And the cuts meant the withdrawal of many services which offered

ARTHUR LABINJO-HUGHES was failed by the system

support but also monitoring of children.

The impact on social work teams dealing with a huge and increasing volume of referrals over this period has been to make an extremely difficult job harder.

Tenable

It is less and less tenable in terms of maximising the protection for the most vulnerable.

Yet inevitably it will be front line social workers that will be in the headlines.

Child protection social workers often work at home in the evenings and at the weekends clocking up more than 50 hours a week—with

the excess work never recognised, let alone paid for.

A culture exists in many teams that to object to this overload is seen as bad form. Weak union organisation amid years of low industrial struggle increases the ability of the bosses to individualise the stress so many social workers feel.

Bullying by management is rife in social work and lower-level managers themselves are often bullied by those at the top squeeze more and more out of their staff.

Timelines for assessments and reports often take priority over the actual interactions between the social worker and the child.

Social work burnout is common

with many not able to continue working in the field.

Inexperienced social workers given large and complex caseloads beyond their trained level is not uncommon.

Child protection teams are often heavily staffed with agency social workers on short term contracts which mean high staff turnover and lack of continuity of care for some of the most vulnerable children.

The closure of the "Sure Start" family centres in the 2000s which offered practical advice and social interaction often for young mothers struggling to cope and seeking assistance was an appalling government policy.

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Social care is in a deep crisis

HUNDREDS OF thousands of people are waiting for an assessment of their care needs or service, a bleak study revealed last week

More than 1.5 million hours of commissioned home care could not be provided between August and October because of lack of staff, according to a survey by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (Adass).

It rang alarm bells over a "rapidly deteriorating picture" as the government faces renewed criticism of its plans for social care.

Adass president Stephen Chandler said, "This survey confirms our worst fears. Red

lights are flashing right across our dashboard.

"Despite magnificent efforts by the committed, courageous and compassionate people working in social care who are delivering extraordinary amounts of care and support, services are failing to meet everyone's needs and older and disabled people are suffering."

Findings indicate that 391,000 people are waiting for an assessment or overdue reassessment of their care needs, or for a service to be provided after assessment.

More than 40,000 people have been waiting longer than six months for an initial assessment.

Reliance on private care fails children

THE Conservative Party is increasingly looking to the private sector to provide placements for children removed from their parents' or guardians' care. This has led to a grotesque commodification of children.

Private firms charge huge sums often to provide fairly basic services.

And, they can end such placements if the child is particularly "challenging".

Local foster placements are often virtually non-existent so children are left in dangerous surroundings as there is no practical alternative.

It's not uncommon for children to be placed in caravan parks and hotels with staff they do not know keeping watch.

All this is an outcome of government decisions to prioritise profit over the care and protection of children.

Now the politicians responsible shed crocodile tears.

The overall result is that social work as an institution becomes less and less about people's needs and increasingly about control.

Prevented

There was also recently another horrendous case of child deaths that could have been prevented.

Three children were aboard the dingy which sank in the English Channel leading to the deaths of 27 people.

The adults on board are reported to have rung the British authorities when in distress only to be told to "ring France". Three children drowned.

Politicians should be outraged that the current system is continuing to kill vulnerable children.

There aren't even demands for an inquiry for these young lives.

None of the major political parties with a significant number of members in parliament are calling for a safe route for child refugees and their families. The result of this will be even more deadly as winter sets in.

Arthur Labinjo-Hughes was failed by the system that in different ways fails so many.

Campaign wins first round of fight against Cambo oil

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

IN A victory for campaigning and protest, giant multinational Shell has announced that it will not support plans to develop the Cambo oil field in the North Sea.

Shell said that the economic case for its development wasn't "strong enough".

But according to one source in Whitehall it was a "vocal minority of activists" that led Shell to pull out.

The recent mass demonstrations around the failed Cop26 summit in Glasgow will have increased the pressure.

But this decision does not mean the Cambo project is dead.

Energy company Siccar Point, which owns a significant stake in the project, has said it could go ahead without Shell's backing.

Siccar Point's chief executive Jonathan Roger said, "Cambo remains critical to the UK's energy security and economy."

It isn't and won't be.

If the British government approved Cambo it would open the way for North Sea oil and gas companies' plans.

They could then extract at least another 1.7 billion barrels of oil from new fields before 2050. This is another brutal twist upwards for fossil fuel capitalism, not a dire need to keep the lights on.

Some "business leaders" and politicians say there will be huge job losses without Cambo. But there are many jobs that can be created in renewables if sustainable production was the priority.

Contracts

Boris Johnson has said his hands are tied on Cambo because of "a contract that was signed in 2001 and we can't just tear up contracts, there is a process to be gone through".

Stopping climate change will mean more than cancelling a few contracts.

It will mean ripping up the whole economic and political approach of leaving crucial decisions to profit-hungry multinationals and the MPs who support them. Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon has

BACK STORY

Oil company Shell last week backed out of plans to develop the Cambo oil field off the coast of Scotland

But development of the field could continue as other firms say they will go on without Shell's backing

Renewable energy could provide jobs and help save the planet

Meanwhile Shell is continuing to exploit oil and gas reserves in South Africa

Resistance is the only way to stop climate disaster

DRILLING IN the Cambo oil field, north west of the Shetland Islands, must be stopped

Privatisation leads to days of power cuts after storm damage

by NICK CLARK

THOUSANDS OF people in Scotland and across the north of England have been left without power for more than a week and half.

Activists say that exploration will affect people that depend on fishing and tourism for their livelihoods. And it will also have a devastating impact on marine life.

Activists organised protests to stop the project last Sunday at dozens of beaches.

Every success against the oil and gas firms emphasises how much still needs to be achieved. But resistance can win.

As the Stop Cambo campaign said, "It's more important than ever that we keep building momentum.

The website of private energy distribution company Northern Powergrid showed there were still more than 100 unplanned power cuts on Monday of this week.

People living without power still had no idea when it would be restored—and said they'd had no help from the private companies.

Rachel Johnston, who lives in a hamlet outside the town of

Poles and electricity cables across the north of England are unstable

Morpeth in Northumberland, went at least ten days without power. She told a BBC interview on Monday, "With regards to Northern Powergrid we've had no help to speak of—no generators, nothing."

"We've had to provide them ourselves if we can. But a lot of the elderly residents haven't got that kind of means to make generators come to the area."

She added, "We had assurances power would be back on, on 1 December. Then I was told on 2 December it would be back on at midnight last night."

Emissions

Shell intends to fire extremely loud shockwave emissions deep into the ocean to survey for oil and gas reserves in the area.

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We still have no power.

Tory business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said the long-lasting power cuts were "completely unacceptable." He added that the government would review the performance of the energy distribution companies.

He said the private companies had "failed to invest in infrastructure."

But energy distribution is only in private hands because Tory governments gave it to them. Tory and Labour governments championed the privatisation and deregulation of the energy industry throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Northern Powergrid is ultimately owned by giant US holding company Berkshire Hathaway.

People forced to rely on it say the company has allowed the network to be run down—and made no plans for the mass outages that would result.

The Tories now want to make a show of hauling private companies over the coals. But the crisis is a result of the cost-cutting that comes when public services are run for profit.

Arctic at risk

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The new coalition government, which is yet to come to power, is formed of the Social Democratic party, the Greens and the Free Democratic party.

The German

fossil fuel infrastructure by the end of the century.

The report also added that much higher targets must be set in the construction, agriculture and transport sectors.

The new administration is already under pressure to strengthen its green pledges.

Johnson's Cop26 plans are already falling apart

DESPITE ALL the promises from Boris Johnson and the Tories it looks increasingly unlikely that Britain will achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Johnson pledged to cut carbon emissions by 78 percent in the next 14 years at the Cop26 climate conference in Glasgow last month.

But the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has warned that this pledge won't be kept unless there is a drastic change in policy.

To get to this target the Tories released a plan that included further investment into renewables. It also included phasing out gas boilers, and rolling out so-called "clean energy" sources such as hydrogen.

But none of this will be enough, according to the CCC.

The government

body added that with current policies in place Britain will instead contribute to a 2.7 degree Celsius temperature rise by 2100.

internationally.

"At home, we need to walk the talk and urgently deliver actions in the net zero strategy."

He added that success should be measured in "climate risks averted—not words on a page."

Cop26 only

happened last month. Already the Tories' climate promises are falling apart.

And during the second national lockdown in November, Johnson gave a speech at a packed leaving do in Number 10.

Since the Christmas jamboree hit the headlines, the Tories' recollections have differed.

Dominic Cummings—Johnson's former adviser who did as he pleased during lockdown—has told his old mates not to lie.

Johnson, rather than denying

said that there is still hope to halt this deadly process.

"While these changes are now expected to happen faster than previously thought and result in a more severe effect, we can still be optimistic about our future if we can limit global warming to 1.5C, as many world leaders have vowed to do," it said.

Scientists are clear that keeping temperatures below a 1.5 degree Celsius rise will help avert greater disaster. But those in power can't be trusted to make this a reality.

The domination of rain in the Arctic will have devastating consequences.

It could lead to permafrost melting,

but the report also

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The German

Socialist Worker WHAT WE THINK

THE TORY MURDERERS ON THE DANCEFLOOR

A SA group of Tories donned their glad rags and partied from the night in mid-December last year, coronavirus ripped across Britain.

Some 514 people died from the virus on 18 December 2020—the same day as 40 to 50 Tories were crammed into Downing Street

enjoying a "boozy party".

Party animals at the Christmas bash celebrated well past midnight.

Festivities included food, drinks, games and a Secret Santa. No doubt they tipped the finest Champagne taxpayers' money can buy as NHS staff risked their lives around the clock.

At the time England was split into the Tories' failed tier system. London was under Tier Three—

stay at home.

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The German

several more shindigs and rule breaches of theirs are being covered up. Cummings also said some political journalists were "at parties in the No 10 flat", so were "trying to bury" rumours.

As the Tories did what they wanted, house parties across the country were shut down. Organisers received fines of up to £10,000 for breaking lockdown rules.

The day before the party, home secretary Priti Patel said she would "call the police on people breaking Christmas rules".

Clearly she wouldn't call them on her mates.

But breaking the rules for a good time isn't new to Johnson's government.

Whether it's intimate moments with their aides or driving to castles, the Tories have flouted their own rules ever since they were introduced.

The "we're all in it together" fable is a lie.

It's us and them, and we must build a fight back on the streets and in our workplaces to make sure they pay for their crimes.

Meanwhile, staff were scared to make "hundreds of life and death decisions about which they knew nothing."

So as hundreds of thousands of people tried to flee, the government put up barriers—protected by soldiers and civil servants—against them.

The scandal isn't that Britain let down some of the few who collaborated with it. It's that, after two decades of war, it wants to wash its hands of the people who paid the price.

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ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS

Why the ruling class can't end Covid crisis

A FEW weeks ago, I read an article by the well-known economist Jonathan Portes concluding, "Covid is for Christmas, while Brexit is for life." Whatever one's views on Brexit, I thought at the time this was a silly line to take. It looks a lot sillier now, as the new Covid Omicron variant looks set to rampage.

As Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, writes in the *Guardian*, two years after the original virus began to circulate in Wuhan, "We remain closer to the start of the pandemic than the end." This is the truth that the capitalist mainstream has been trying to evade.

Boris Johnson represents an extreme version of this evasion. He has relied on a combination of vaccinations and the high level of infections made inevitable by dropping most restrictions back in the summer to achieve herd immunity. Now he is confronted with the reality that, as Edward Luce of the *Financial Times* put it, "There is no such thing as herd immunity in one country."

So why have the leading ruling classes found it so hard to deal with Covid? After all they command huge resources. There are two reasons.

The first is that capitalism treats nature as simply an object to be manipulated, a reservoir of raw materials.

The greater the destruction of nature by capitalism, the more they resort to technological fixes. We can see this with climate change.

Rather than dismantle fossil capitalism, the main ruling classes are betting on the emergence of technologies that will mitigate the damage it is causing.

Vaccines are another technological fix. Don't get me wrong—the rapid development of effective vaccines against Covid-19 is a tremendous scientific achievement that has saved many lives. I can't wait to get my booster.

But nature is a complex of dynamic processes of transformation. This is true at the macro-level of this inconceivably vast multiverse of which our planet is a tiny part.

It is also true at the micro-level where viruses emerge and seek to propagate themselves by colonising as many cells as possible.

It was therefore quite predictable that natural selection would throw up genetic variations of the Sars-CoV-2 virus better at bypassing the barriers erected in our cells by the vaccine. Indeed, this was predicted by many experts.

And it seems that in Omicron one such variant has arrived.

Nature

Here we come to the second reason. Marx said that humans interact with the rest of nature chiefly through their labour. But this relationship is itself structured by the dominant relations of production. These are the class antagonism created by the exploitation of wage labour by capital and the competitive struggle between rival firms and states.

This means vaccines are produced for profit—Pfizer, the dominant producer, expects to see revenues over £21 billion from its version next year.

An investment analyst calls the Pfizer vaccine—actually developed by the German company BioNTech—"a once-in-an-epoch economic windfall."

Moreover, the distribution of vaccines reflects the hierarchy of wealth and power in the world. The wealthy states have grabbed vaccines for their own citizens and left the virus to flourish in the Global South.

According to the *Financial Times*, "So far, 66 per cent of people living in G7 countries have had two vaccine doses—in Africa, only 6 per cent."

The number of people in high income countries who have had booster shots is almost double the number in low income countries who have received first and second doses."

This gigantic inequality creates conditions in which new variants can incubate. They may develop in unvaccinated individuals, perhaps particularly those with weak immune systems. The high number of variations in Omicron may allow it to bypass the immunity conferred by past infection or vaccination.

The moral of all this isn't just that, as the UN says, "no one is safe until everyone is safe."

It's that capitalism is toxic, and we can only really be safe when we get rid of it and reset our relationship with nature.

WHILE THE Tories attack the poor they won't examine the drug issues in their ranks

New Tory drug policies won't smoke out rich

by SAM ORD

THE GOVERNMENT'S new drug strategy for England and Wales is a sham.

The plan claims that it will completely overhaul the drug recovery and treatment system.

But it will still largely target poorer people and let the rich off the hook.

The Tories say some £300 million will be invested into drug treatment and diversion in a bid to reduce the number of jailed users and turn them to healthcare.

But it's all built on a plan of harsher punishments for drug users.

Boris Johnson told the *Sun* newspaper, "We need to look at new ways of penalising them. Things that will actually interfere with their lives."

"So we will look at taking away their passports and driving licences."

Powers

The Tories are also looking to add even more powers into the police bill presently going through parliament.

Niamh Eastwood, the Executive Director of the think tank, *Release* said, "The focus on more punitive sentences for people who supply drugs is a continuation of a tired tough-on-drugs narrative, one that we have had in Britain for decades.

"This failed policy will

do little to address the high rates of drug-related deaths, which over the last decade have increased year on year, with some of the highest rates in Europe."

She added, "Britain is going backwards, embracing a Richard Nixon-style 'war on drugs' approach."

Legalised

Many drug reform activists point to more progressive approaches such as Canada and US states which have recently legalised recreational cannabis.

But Johnson denounced a change in Scotland where prosecutors can refer people accused of drugs offences for "diversion".

Drug abuse is a health issue, not a crime.

People should be given information and if necessary proper support and medical

treatment to recover from addiction.

Presently policies are dominated by class inequality and racism.

Black people are still far more likely to be arrested and convicted over drug charges than white people and face much harsher sentences.

Alcohol companies receive backing and cooperation from the government.

The hypocritical Tories should stop cutting drug and alcohol services for those in need.

What's your story?

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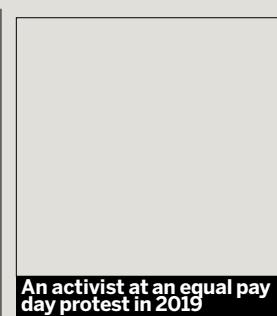
The gender pay gap is still wide open

GOVERNMENT policies have not improved the gender pay gap, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS).

Its new report has found that working age women in Britain earned 40 percent less a week than men in 2019.

This is largely because women are nearly 10 percent less likely to be in paid work, do eight fewer hours of work a week than men, and earn 19 percent less per hour on average than men.

Women also do 1.8 hours more unpaid



An activist at an equal pay day protest in 2019

work daily than men. From the mid-1990s women have moved from being 5 percent less likely to 5 percent more likely to have a

degree than men. But male graduates still earn 23 percent more than females.

Monica Costa-Dias, deputy research director at the IFS and an author of the report, said, "Huge gender gaps remain across employment, working hours and wages."

After accounting for the rapid improvement in women's education, there has been almost no progress on gender gaps in paid work over the past quarter century." Isabel Ringrose

Victory at Royal Parks shows unions are not playing games

Bullying bosses at an outsourcing firm thought playground attendants and cleaners would be a pushover. But they've been schooled by a powerful series of strikes, reports **Nick Clark**

OUTSOURCED WORKERS in parks across London are celebrating victory after more than a month's worth of strikes.

Cleaners and playground attendants have won significantly improved sick pay and stopped all threatened job losses. They also won union recognition and promises to improve how wages are paid.

The workers forced the agreement out of bosses with a walkout for the whole of October, and 16 days of strikes in August.

Striker Antonietta said the sustained, determined action was key to the workers' victory.

"I don't think this would have happened if we hadn't done the whole month strike," she told Socialist Worker.

"The company said they wanted to 'go mobile' and people would lose their jobs. But Royal Parks don't like bad publicity. The month long strike was definitely worth it."

The strikers, who work in Royal Parks including Hyde Park and St James's Park in central London, are outsourced to private company Just Ask Services.

Demanded

They began their campaign of strikes after bosses threatened redundancies earlier this year. The strikers, members of the PCS and UVW unions, also demanded the same pay and conditions as workers employed directly.

In particular, they wanted an increase in sick pay, as Just Ask gave them just six days. Now bosses have agreed to pay up to three months sick pay, and no one has lost their jobs.

Just Ask initially said the sick pay offer didn't apply to workers originally employed on older contracts. But strikers refused to settle until the deal applied to all workers—and threatened further strikes over Christmas.

Bosses had to amend the offer to apply to all workers, and strikers voted unanimously to accept it at a meeting last week. They also elected new union reps from among themselves.

Solidarity

Hagar Bentum, another striker, described how the workers' unity and resolve was built through action and solidarity.

"When we first went on strike in the summer, quite a lot of people didn't join it," she said. "But when we took action in October, a lot of those members took part."

"At first, people were scared that they wouldn't get paid. When we



CLEANERS AND playground assistants for Royal Parks in London on strike in October

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

told them we had been paid during our first strike, it encouraged them to join the second one.

"I was shocked myself that PCS were able to pay all of us. They made an appeal for donations, and we are so, so grateful to them."

The PCS says the deal also includes "constructive proposals" over ongoing issues.

"There are always little issues to take up," said Antonietta. "The way they write hours on the payslips, people are doing more than what they should be doing."

"People have been moved around to different sites from places they've been in for years, and that's costing them more for transport."

But she added that the strike had put workers in a stronger position. "We've got recognition, we've got representatives for the union—I'm one of them. Now we know we've got that."

Work-life going down the tubes

LONDON "NIGHT Tube" strikes on the Central and Victoria lines on Fridays and Saturdays are causing huge disruption.

Workers in the RMT union are fighting to stop London Underground breaking Night Tube agreements. Bosses want to bring in new working arrangements that the union claims would wreck drivers' work-life balance.

The strikes have led to long waiting times as far fewer trains are running.

A sign of the bosses' recklessness could be seen a Tottenham Court Road on the Central Line last weekend. The

station remained open, despite having reduced staff and overcrowded platforms.

One passenger fell onto the tracks and had to be taken to hospital.

The right has since tried to use this incident to attack the unions.

Tory London assembly member Emma Best said, "Today's strike action is reckless and irresponsible. Disrupting the Night Tube will leave many Londoners without a safe route home and hurt our night-time economy."

But the incident was not caused by the strike. Instead, it shows the risks management are willing to take to keep stations open, and boost their claim to be running a service.

Unite's Sharon Graham

No to below inflation deals

UNITE UNION leader Sharon Graham says that wage rises must at least match inflation—or that workers will pay for the pandemic.

And she rightly says that inflation should be measured using the RPI rate, currently 6 percent.

But millions of workers, including many Unite members, are facing "pay rises" far below this figure.

It is a good sign that more workers are planning action, or are already out on strike to win better pay.

But deals that amount to an effective pay cut, even if they are above the original offer by bosses, are not wins.

Backdated

For example, over 500 workers in Liverpool employed by the Peel Ports Group will receive a 4.5 percent pay increase backdated to 1 June.

They were originally offered 2 percent.

But 4.5 percent is under the RPI inflation rate, so in real terms is a cut.

Some 1,100 Morrisons warehouse workers called off their strikes after accepting a 5 percent pay offer backdated to August.

Threats of a strike at the Stanlow oil refinery in Cheshire have ended as the 400 workers accepted a deal that provides backdated pay from January 2021 of 1.5 percent. The inflation rate in January was around 1.3 percent.

They will also receive 6.3 percent from January 2022. Although this is a rise, a rise of 0.2 percent will have little effect with inflation set to continue to rise.

Unite and other unions should not accept deals of less than 10 percent and should be ready to take their members on strike to win this.

IN BRIEF

US drone strike on Syrian family

A US airstrike in Syria has seriously wounded a family of six—including a ten year old child who may never recover.

The family's car was hit in a drone strike targeting a motorcycle ridden by a senior member of Islamist group al-Qaeda.

Ahmed Qasoum, who passed as the strike hit, said, "My 10 year old son has had a fractured skull and is now in a very serious condition in intensive care.

"Doctors have told me that he would have nerve problems on his right side in the future.

"My 15-year-old daughter also suffered serious wounds to her head."

The US used the growth of the Islamist group Isis to launch a bombing campaign in Syria in 2014.

This drone strike comes after the US last month defended a drone strike that killed 80 civilians in 2019.

Indian soldiers kill miners

SOLDIERS KILLED more than a dozen villagers from India's north eastern Nagaland state last weekend.

The military attacked a truck filled with miners returning home from work after an alleged "tip off". Eight miners were killed.

As villagers reacted by burning two military vehicles, soldiers fired and killed another six people.

With news of the army killings spreading online, Indian authorities then shut down the internet and phone communications.

The Naga tribes demand separation from the Indian state, and have fought a guerrilla war against India for decades.

New crackdown in Myanmar

A MILITARY vehicle drove into protesters in Myanmar at the weekend leaving five people dead and many injured.

Democracy protesters in Yangon, the country's most populous city, took to the streets.

As they made their customary three-fingered salute—borrowed from the Hunger Games books—they were met with soldiers' gunfire.

The regime has tightened its grip on the cities in recent months.

On Monday it found deposed prime minister Aung San Suu Kyi guilty of inciting dissent, and the state is bringing forward more charges.

It is not clear whether she will be imprisoned, or if her house arrest will continue.

UN trying to undermine Sudan revolt with deal

by CHARLIE KIMBER

THE UNITED Nations and the African Union are trying to end the revolt in Sudan against the military regime and its allies.

But people continue to take to the streets to demand democracy and real political change.

Last month the previous civilian prime minister, Abdallah Hamdok signed a sell-out deal with coup leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

It accepted a government of "technocrats", no accountability for the military's crimes and only the vaguest promise of future elections.

Anti-coup protesters who had been fighting on the streets facing brutal repression were outraged by the agreement.

But now international bodies are giving it cover, and that will encourage Burhan and his co-conspirators to launch further assaults.

In a joint press conference with the chairperson of the African Union last week, United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres said Sudanese people should support the deal.

"I believe that questioning this solution, even if I understand the indignation of the people, would be very dangerous for Sudan," he added.

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) which has led some of the protests rejected that message.

It said it went against "the will of the Sudanese street, which rejects this agreement and its outcome".

And it added that the United Nations was effectively relaying Burhan's threat that if protests continued then they would be crushed.

The Sudanese revolution can rely only on its own protests and strikes,

its own organisation and the support of ordinary people internationally.

On Tuesday of last week tens of thousands of people took to the streets across Sudan, continuing the battle against the military.

Security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters near the presidential palace in the capital, Khartoum.

Other protests took place in cities including Port Sudan, Kassala, Nyala and Atbara. And a group bringing together some of the local resistance committees, which have led the resistance on the ground, also reiterated its determination to keep fighting.

"We promise the masses of our people in all cities, villages, and townships that there will be no retreat or complacency," it said.

"The people are always stronger, defection is non-viable, and the popular demand will prevail, be victorious, and continue towards its goals. Our motto will remain 'No deliberation, No compromise, No partnership' with criminals.'

"We refuse any intermediary or settlement with the coup leaders, and we will carry on our struggle and fight to oust the coup and take the criminals before justice."

The statement was signed by resistance committees in the cities of Khartoum, Greater Omdurman, Bahri, Haj Yousif and Sharg al Nile.

FRANCE

Trouble for far right as Zemmour faces resistance

FRENCH FAR right candidate Eric Zemmour is in trouble as protesters confront him and ruling class figures wonder whether he is the right man for them.

He is falling in polls for next year's presidential election and is now third behind the incumbent Emmanuel Macron and the fascist Marine Le Pen.

Thousands of people marched against Zemmour as he launched his official campaign at a rally in Paris last Sunday. He had already shifted the venue from its original location for fear it wasn't secure against protests.

Meanwhile inside the rally activists from SOS Racisme stood

up to reveal black shirts spelling out the slogan "No to Racism".

Videos taken by journalists showed male Zemmour supporters punching the activists and chairs being thrown.

Zemmour's racist agenda was on display during a speech with references to fascist "great replacement" theory. This claims white people are threatened by immigration.

"If I win that election, it won't be one more political changeover but the beginning of the reconquest of the most beautiful country," Zemmour told his cheering supporters.

"We are defending our country, our homeland, our

ancestral heritage."

Zemmour's new party is called Reconquest.

But some of his previous rich and powerful backers are now not sure about him. He has lost his main financial supporter.

It's too early to say Zemmour is finished. And he has already pulled the debate further to the right.

France's conservative Les Républicains party picked its candidate, Valérie Pécresse, last week after a primary contest dominated by who could be hardest on migrants and Muslims.

The protests have to continue, and should also target Le Pen.

Racist candidate —Eric Zemmour

Volunteers not answer

TORY HEALTH secretary Sajid Javid's has plans for a reserve army of retired NHS workers to plug the gaping holes in NHS staffing. That would be a joke if the issue wasn't so serious.

There are an estimated 100,000 vacancies, and we are short of over 35,000 nurses.

Javid wants "reservists" to call on at times of high demand, such as winter, or during specific programmes, such as vaccination drives.

The Sun newspaper is championing this plan.

This week it launched its campaign for volunteers for a "jabs army" to deal with the Omicron variant.

It's true that volunteers have already helped at vaccination centres. But this is no way to run an essential service.

The NHS is already dependent on staff working over their paid hours.

Many NHS employees also work as bank staff and for agencies to bolster understaffed wards and departments—usually giving up their holiday or rest days to do so.

The call on retired health service workers to come back misses the fact that many already carry on working after their "retirement" as their pension is so poor.

And, Javid's plan fails to appreciate that because of his party's "reforms" thousands of NHS staff cannot now retire until they're 67 years old.

Many of those won't be able to do their old jobs.

The solution to the NHS staffing crisis is not volunteers but a mass recruitment campaign of properly trained and paid professionals.

Ian McKendrick
 Oxford

Are we sleeping our way into a police state?

IS THE British left asleep, or something?

Recently an activist for Insulate Britain was sentenced to nearly a year in prison for blocking a road.

It's a terrible precedent—I mean, how many times have you been on a protest that's blocked a road illegally?

Environmental writer George Monbiot wrote afterwards, saying, Britain is on the road to becoming a "police state". He's bloody



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

When the president opens his mouth, Turkish lira falls

TURKEY'S PRESIDENT Erdogan live on state television last week made for very interesting viewing.

Every answer he gave to questions about the economy caused the Turkish lira to lose some more of its value.

Yet the president announced there would be no change in economic policy.

And every time he stressed this, the working population of Turkey saw their wages melt away in real terms.

This year the lira has lost about 45 percent of its value. Last month it lost 28.3 percent.

This means wages and savings are constantly being eroded at a time when the pandemic has already made the lives of working people and the poor uncertain and often unbearable.

As the lira becomes worthless, the cost of imported stuff goes up and the rate of inflation rises. It is currently around 20 percent.

This means that every time you go to the supermarket you know you will pay more than you did on your previous visit. You try to buy less of everything.

The poor in Turkey will often skip a meal and make do with a traditional "simit"—a circular bagel-like bread covered in sesame seeds, with a cup of tea.

This week the price of a simit went up from 2.5 to 3.5 lira.

This is not a huge amount of money—3.5 lira is roughly 20 pence. But it is still an increase of 40 percent.

As a result, for the first time in history, street sellers now offer half a simit. Having changed the

political system in the country to what is effectively one-man rule, Erdogan now has a problem.

As the economy goes increasingly pear-shaped, there is no one he can blame—everyone can see he is running the show.

Opinion polls show that many who voted for Erdogan and his party are drawing the obvious conclusion and deserting them.

However, the next elections are not until mid-2023.

That is plenty of time for a growing wave of struggle, perhaps not yet huge but certainly on the rise.

That could get rid of a president who has single-handedly managed to impoverish millions of working people.

Ronnie Margulies
 East London

Protests incinerate deadly Labour plan

THE CAMPAIGN against the Edmonton incinerator in north London has forced a major crack in its planned expansion.

Haringey council last week broke ranks with the North London Waste Authority (NLWA), which is run by seven, mostly Labour, London boroughs.

Councillors called for "pause and review" of the incinerator plans.

Tireless campaigning and protests forced Haringey to change its position.

The mounting pressure was clear when a march in

September led to an occupation of the giant North Circular road.

The growing protests at council meetings about the incinerator also showed that people were waking up to the dangers of toxic emissions.

Some Labour councillors on the board of NLWA are still defending the incinerator expansion.

Rather than listening to the science, the health experts and the people, they are behaving as corporate spin doctors.

None of the councillors

in favour of the incinerator have mentioned the implicit environmental racism that would accompany the expansion.

The surrounding areas are disproportionately black and Asian.

And they ignore the hidden social murder resulting from deadly toxins ingested by the poor.

We must keep up the pressure and now start applying it to all the other north London boroughs involved.

Raj Perera
 North London

Just a thought...

Let Johnson party on

THE revelations that Boris Johnson and his Cabinet Office mates partied their way through lockdown last year has generated much anger.

Am I the only one who wants to see more government ministers endangering themselves and their bag carriers by playing fast and loose with Covid?

Name withheld
 By email

THE TORIES think rules are for "little people" and don't apply to the like of them. What hypocrisy!

Philip Nutt
 Paddington, west London

Priorities of a sick society

A COMMUNITY Union statement today announced the end of the two-month long strike at Clarks shoes. It described the fight as "fire and rehire Defeated!"

It certainly has been! In fact, the fire and rehire proposal, which would have reduced most hourly rates from £11.16 an hour to £9.50p an hour, has been smashed to pieces.

I would like to congratulate the strikers, and all the trade unionists who gave their support.

Dave Chapple
 Mendip Trades Union Council, Somerset

Exoneration was televised

YOUR ARTICLE about the murder of Malcolm X in 1965 was right to point the finger at both the Nation of Islam group and the FBI (Socialist Worker, 1 December).

But I thought you should have given at least a mention to the role of the Netflix documentary *Who Killed Malcolm X?* in getting Muhammad A Aziz and Khalil Islam exonerated.

The evidence in the programmes clearly showed a miscarriage of justice—and embarrassed the state into a climb down.

Peter Estoe
 Washington, US

I DON'T know why your paper is so interested in Malcolm X. He wasn't even left wing.

Jane
 By email

SOLIDARITY BY THE SEA IN SUSSEX

As refugees arrive on the shores of southern England, the Tories and the right wing press tell stories of hatred and hostility. But in Hastings **Isabel Ringrose** found a network of activists to help arrivals on the beach—and a sense of sympathy among the people who live there

PUSHED OFF course by winds and tides, boats of refugees now regularly arrive on the beaches of Hastings—and many of the people who live there have sprung into action with solidarity and support.

Volunteers with Hastings Supports Refugees set up a beach response team who are on standby for when boats or lifeboats arrive.

In November one dinghy was rescued carrying 53 refugees, including five children. Another rescued dinghy had been lost in the water for about 20 hours.

Pubs and cafes have provided food, tea and hot chocolate to hand out, as well as clothing.

For those arriving, crossing the Channel between northern France and the English south coast is the last leg of an arduous journey.

With routes in the back of lorries or through the tunnel tightened up, some 26,000 refugees have taken to the freezing and busy water in dinghies this year.

Too often these boats don't last the journey. Just two weeks ago 27 refugees drowned while British and French authorities cynically squabbled over whose responsibility they were.

Rachel Roser is a volunteer for Hastings Supports Refugees and part of the beach first response team. She told Socialist Worker that when volunteers receive alerts of an incoming boat, "you don't know what it's going to be like."

"But then you get to the beach and see ordinary people in need, and swing into action. You feel like you've done something useful and worthwhile."



"The government could take action overnight to stop the drownings if it really wanted to"

Lifeboat crews across part of the south coast have been rescuing migrants crossing the Channel. In Hastings, Sussex, they are supported by volunteers who bring food, clothes and hot drinks



Murals in alcoves on Hastings' seafront convey messages of unity (left and right) PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN
Refugee support activists (top) and the people they help (above)

Rachel explained that when leaving northern France, refugees head to Dover. "When they come to Hastings something has gone wrong," she said. "They've been pushed off course, it's windy, or they don't have enough petrol. Then the lifeboats bring them here."

"The vast majority of people in Hastings are lovely and want to help," Rachel added. Activists and volunteers formed a network to ensure they're always on hand when a boat arrives.

The RNLI is called out to sea to rescue boats, receiving calls from boats

themselves or others who know of boats in distress. Rescuers can alert volunteers, and tracking apps also help people to keep an eye on the movement of different boats in the Channel.

Residents on the sea front also watch out and alert each other if a boat is coming in, or being rescued.

Since the deaths, Hastings Supports Refugees has smashed a target of £5,000 in donations and instead hit £20,000, showing that people across the country are also looking to help.

"It feels really sad that 27 people drowned, especially because it could've gone differently," Rachel said. "If they

were rescued, it could've been me giving them some tea or dry socks."

"People shouldn't believe what's in the papers. I explain to people that we have half the amount of refugees coming to Britain than there were 20 years ago, so the numbers have been decreasing."

The blood of each person who has died on the channel is on the hands of Boris Johnson, Priti Patel and all those who champion border controls.

"The government could take action to stop this overnight if it wants to. But doing the opposite plays into the Tories' racist agenda—they feed people the

truths that there's a real person who's come over in front of them, they don't say anything."

"I'm angry because I know it could've been stopped. There should be a way to safely claim asylum before they get to England. Some suggest a consulate in Calais, but what about a website to claim online before they make the journey?"

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"I'm angry because I know it could've been stopped. There should be a way to safely claim asylum before they get to England. Some suggest a consulate in Calais, but what about a website to claim online before they make the journey?"

Another woman told Socialist Worker she agreed that "there needs to be a process so that they don't have to cross water".

"But I think it would be better if they could stay where they are, with their families. They should be able to ask to come here only if their

country is in a bad state," she said. She also believes that refugees are coming to Britain because it's seen as a "soft touch" and "the government isn't able to sort the situation out".

Matthew lives and works in Hastings. "These people coming are human—we should remember that," he told Socialist Worker. "We all need to care for each other and help one another."

Caroline, another Hastings resident, added that it's "shocking" how refugees would rather risk their lives crossing the Channel than stay in the conditions they're fleeing from.

"It shows the level of desperation people reach," she said. "These people probably don't earn much money at home, and they use their life savings on a potentially disastrous trip trying to reach a better life and get away from where they are."

"The places they're leaving are war torn countries, or countries with suffering. Or they're trying to reach loved ones here."

Caroline also wants refugees who arrive to be accommodated properly. "There should be a system in place to help them to be safe somewhere—it doesn't matter where—so long as they have security, warmth and the basics," she added.

"Unfortunately for them, refugees come from areas that aren't as well off as Britain," Lucy added. "I can go on holiday while it's being made illegal for them to travel."

"People here need to be educated more as to why they're coming over. And we need a government that's going to help."

Lifeboat crews in Hastings have rescued dozens of refugees in recent months



'These people are human—we all need to care for each other'—Voices from the sea front

NOT EVERYONE in Hastings feels so strongly that they become involved with support for the incoming refugees. But many people there feel more welcoming to refugees than the Tories and the media would have us believe.

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country is in a bad state," she said. She also believes that refugees are coming to Britain because it's seen as a "soft touch" and "the government isn't able to sort the situation out".

Lucy, a college student in Hastings, disagrees. She thinks the majority of refugees can't simply stay put and should be welcomed, but that the Tories are making this impossible.

Britain isn't the main destination for migrants—it takes a handful of refugees every year in comparison to other European countries.

Dangerous

"These crossings are so risky, but they're clearly leaving terrible conditions," Lucy explained. "No one would put their lives at risk unless it was too dangerous for them to stay where they are."

"They're not getting any help. Why not?" she asked. "Kids are dying needlessly and no one seems to be helping. How can that be allowed to happen?"

"Refugees are not coming to do damage and steal jobs like we're told, but to be safe."

"I can't work out how people believe otherwise. Or believe that there's nothing that can be done here. Keeping people safe shouldn't be so difficult."

"Unfortunately for them, refugees come from areas that aren't as well off as Britain," Lucy added. "I can go on holiday while it's being made illegal for them to travel."

"People here need to be educated more as to why they're coming over. And we need a government that's going to help."

The truth about the fishers—and the blocked lifeboat

NEWS STORIES circulated last week of fishers in Hastings "blocking" an RNLI lifeboat on the beach as it headed out to rescue migrants.

But Jenny Sutton, an activist with Hastings Stand Up To Racism, says this paints an inaccurate picture of what happened.

"Accusations of fishers blocking the lifeboat have been rejected in a statement by the fisherman's association saying that wasn't true," she explained.

Hastings has an open beach, where both fishers and the RNLI launch their boats. There was an argument when the RNLI shouted at a fisher, who was on the beach, to get out of the way.

A lorry driver, unconnected to the fishers, then threw abuse at RNLI volunteers for rescuing migrants.

Jenny said activists have "been keen to play down any false polarisation" between the fishers and volunteers, as it feeds the divides the Tories rely on.

While campaigning Jenny said there has been some hostility, but it's often from people "who have been shafted themselves," said Jenny.

"They can't get a house, or a job, and they use the 'too many foreigners' classic line we're fed."

"There's a lot of poverty in Hastings, yet we've also had people come up to us with not much money but who are donating baked beans and clothes."

"Once locals meet people off the boats, they see the desperate state they're in. It hits home and after engaging directly and getting their stories it's clear they're just ordinary people."

Jenny slammed Priti Patel's policies for "promoting drowning as the ultimate deterrent" and said the Home Office knew a deadly incident was going to happen.

"They dehumanise refugees and once they do, refugees are no longer seen as people—but illegal immigrants," she added.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.uk or phone 020 7840 5602

Socialist Workers Party online meetings



Priti Patel wants the Border Force to 'push back' migrants

Fighting the Nationality and Borders Bill The case against immigration controls

BRADFORD
Thu 16 Dec, 7pm
885-9187-7552

LIVERPOOL
Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
493-925-5919

LONDON: ISLINGTON
Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
874-012-7970

BRIGHTON & HOVE
Tom Paine—a revolutionary in Lewes

Thu 16 Dec, 6.30pm
874-3262-3749

The Elephant & Castle
White Hill, Lewes
BN7 2DJ

BURNLEY & PENDLE
Anger to revolution—why do people rise up?

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
738 949 2405

CARDIFF

Does Lenin matter today?

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
630-181-4857

CHESTERFIELD

Political art—culture and resistance

Thu 16 Dec, 7pm
828-532-8731

COVENTRY

Booklaunch: Work and Resistance in the 21st Century

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
823-945-1917

With author Jane Hardy

DEVON & CORNWALL
Refugees, Fortress Europe and the politics of fear

Thu 16 Dec, 7.30pm
865-2972-2883

DUNDEE, ABERDEEN & PERTH
South Africa—the soundtrack to the struggle

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
894-2628-7708

EAST MIDLANDS

Islamophobia, racism and the politics of fear

Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
354-874-4790

HARLOW

Lenin—a revolutionary for today?

Thu 16 Dec,
7.30pm

832-8746-7480

HASTINGS

The bloody history of the British Empire

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
880-5464-3685

COVENTRY

Booklaunch: Work and Resistance in the 21st Century

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
823-945-1917

With author Jane Hardy

HUDDERSFIELD
Booklaunch: Transgender Resistance, Socialism and the Fight for Liberation

Wed 15 Dec, 6.30pm
290-168-1804

KENT

How the Black Panthers fought the state

Thu 16 Dec, 8.15pm
434-623-8064

LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

Patterns of revolution—what can we learn from Sudan?

Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
992-204-9372

LEEDS

The politics of country music

Thu 16 Dec, 6pm
881-4770-0676

LONDON: HACKNEY

Lenin—a revolutionary for today?

Thu 16 Dec, 7.30pm
854-8245-8715



The Socialist Workers Party continues to hold mostly online meetings during the pandemic. This ensures that there can still be collective and safe discussion, organising and actions. Occasionally branches will hold in-person meetings with precautions taken for a safe environment.

Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and just before the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. **The password for all meetings is 967537.**

Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty for news of national online meetings and other updates.

LONDON: HARINGEY
Can art help us change the world?

Wed 15 Dec,
7.30pm
459-388-1576

LONDON: NEWHAM

What's gone wrong with the economy?

Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
288-098-8827

LONDON: SOUTH

Is revolution possible in the 21st century?

Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
861-9481-1795

LONDON: SOUTH EAST

Can the Tories deliver a high wage economy?

Thu 16 Dec, 7pm
529-913-6390

LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS
Let's talk about sex—Marxism and sexuality

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
818-391-0420

LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST

Macron, France and Islamophobia

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
543-023-057

MANCHESTER

The revolutionary ideas of Rosa Luxemburg

Wed 15 Dec,
7.15pm
323-178-7151

NEWCASTLE

Fighting fascism—the united front

Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
368-595-2712

NORWICH
Fascism—what is it and how do we fight it?

Thu 16 Dec, 7.30pm
906-652-5299

SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Environmental crisis and the myth of overpopulation

Thu 16 Dec, 7pm
528-174-9278

SOUTHAMPTON & PORTSMOUTH

China, the Uyghurs and the left

Wed 15 Dec, 7.30pm
381-513-5080

SWANSEA & WEST WALES

Booklaunch: Work and Resistance in the 21st Century

Thu 16 Dec, 7pm
902-964-963

With author Jane Hardy

WIGAN

Why we hate Mondays—Marxism and alienation

Thu 16 Dec, 7pm
Book-Cycle
Buckley St W
WN6 7PQ

YORK & SCARBOROUGH

A rebel's guide to George Orwell

Wed 15 Dec, 7pm
827-489-7492

BOOKMARKS the socialist bookshop



The Labour Party—A Marxist History
by Tony Cliff, Donny Gluckstein and Charlie Kimber, £14.99



Breaking Up the British State—Scotland, Independence and Socialism £12



Does privilege explain racism?
by Esme Choonara, Ken Olende, Yuri Prasad and Weyman Bennett, £3



Transgender Resistance
by Laura Miles £10

PHONE 020 7637 1848 WEB bookmarksbookshop.co.uk

CONTACT THE SWP

Phone 020 7840 5600
Email enquiries@swp.org.uk
Post PO Box 74955 London E16 9EJ



A touching—yet uneasy—story of refugee footballers

Captains of Zaatari has won praise and plaudits for its portrayal of the dreams of two young Syrian refugees. But approach with caution, writes **Nick Clark**

THERE ARE glimmers of insight into life in the world's largest Syrian refugee camp, in **Captains of Zaatari**.

This documentary is the story of teenagers Fawzi and Mahmoud, who dream of becoming professional footballers as a way out of Jordan's Zaatari camp.

To them, it seems a more realistic proposition than getting a degree and a job. "There are no jobs here," says Fawzi, sitting in candlelight on the floor of his family's pre-fab shelter. "People with certificates collect garbage."

Though blunt, this early exposition doesn't feel forced. The film opens with scenes of lads playing barefoot on the camp's gravelly, uneven ground. It's only as the story progresses that we realise this is more than play.

There's a tournament. Its players, with team kits and coaches, are observed by official-looking people from outside the camp.

Something about the way they play says the match means a lot. They're vying for selection to play abroad in a tournament in Qatar.

We're never properly introduced to the tournament's organiser, the Aspire Academy, and it never quite takes centre stage. But its fairy godmother-like intervention—whisking the boys away to a possible bright future in the Gulf—underpins the whole thing.

Is it a charity? An NGO? A bit of digging online reveals Aspire is a very well-funded training centre set up by Qatar's royal family to promote Qatari sport internationally.

Reputation

So the film is timely, given Qatar's efforts to boost its reputation by hosting the World Cup next year.

Incidentally, the World Cup is also the subject of director Ali El Arabi's next documentary. A football fan from India gets a job as a stadium worker in Qatar so that he might follow his dream to watch the matches. Hmm.

The most moving part of **Captains of Zaatari** isn't to do with the tournament. Fawzi's dad is sick, working undocumented, and separated from his family after being arrested.

It's one of the genuine insights into refugee life that earned the documentary some very good reviews when it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival this year. And the film has had support from a broad range of established film and documentary institutes.

But the subtle, paternal presence of the Qatari state in this story demands a healthy dose of scepticism.

Captains of Zaatari is available to stream at watch.dogwoof.com



STOKELY CARMICHAEL speaking in London, 1967

PICTURE: HORACE OVE

Caribbean-British history through art

EXHIBITION

LIFE BETWEEN ISLANDS

Until 3 April 2022 at Tate Britain, central London

TATE BRITAIN has opened **Life Between Islands**, a landmark exhibition exploring the extraordinary breadth of Caribbean-British art over four generations. The exhibition

begins with artists of the Windrush generation who came to Britain in the 1950s.

The rise of Black Power in Britain is shown in works such as Horace Ove's photographs of Stokely Carmichael (pictured) and Neil Kenlock's Black Panther school bags 1970.

Works from the Black Arts Movement of the 1970s and 80s depict the social and political

struggles faced by second generation Caribbean-British people.

The exhibition ends with artists who have emerged more recently.

It includes new works created especially for the exhibition, and a photographic installation by Liz Johnson Artur charting the development of south London's Grime scene.

When Malcolm X visited a West Midlands town

RADIO

MALCOLM IN THE MIDLANDS

BBC World Service, 12 noon, Saturday 11 December and then on BBC Sounds

JUST DAYS before his assassination, Malcolm X was to be seen striding up a quiet residential street in the English town of Smethwick

But what led one of the world's most prominent civil rights activists to this small town in the Midlands?

And what does this have to do with British politics of the

mid-1960s, and the civil rights movement in the US?

Kit de Waal visits Marshall Street to trace the steps Malcolm X took, over 55 years ago, and speaks to local resident and playwright Paul Magson.

He was so intrigued by the story and shocked by that fact he had not heard of Malcolm's visit before, he researched and wrote a play about it.

With interviews and news archive from the time, de Waal discover how important this visit was to black people living in Smethwick at the time.



Malcolm X in Smethwick

FILM

GET OUT

Friday 17 December, 11 pm on E4

JORDAN PEELE'S first comedy horror was a hit when it came out in 2017.

Black photographer Chris is visiting his girlfriend's white parents for the first time.

The spectre of the first waves of the Black Lives



Daniel Kaluuya as Chris

Matter movement hovers over the film, from the opening scene when we watch an increasingly uncomfortable black man lost at night in a leafy white suburb.

And any black person who has grown up in Britain will recognise the frightfully polite genteel bigotry where nothing "offensive" is said but the racist assumptions remain naked.

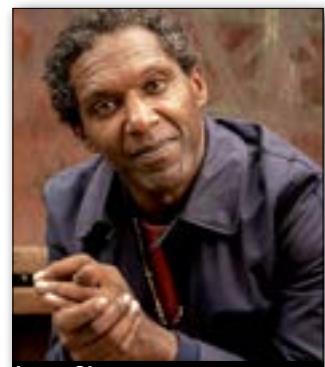
RADIO

LEMN SISSAY'S POETRY REBELS

Friday 10 December, 7pm, BBC Radio 4, and then on BBC Sounds

THIS, THE second episode in a series, is on "political poets."

Lemn Sissay explores



Lemn Sissay

how poets in the 1970s performed alongside reggae groups and punk bands, telling the stories of the streets in language the streets understood.

Attila the Stockbroker remembers skirmishing with skinheads.

And Benjamin Zephaniah explains why writing about racism was a matter of life and death.

Whose politics dominated the battle against the racist apartheid system in South Africa?

The automatic answer is Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC).

But for a decade in the 1960s and 70s, the strongest and most energetic force was Black Consciousness, led by Steve Biko.

Most people have heard his name only in a Peter Gabriel song, or in the film *Cry Freedom*. It concentrates on his friendship with the white liberal journalist Donald Woods—and Woods becomes the hero.

But Biko was much more significant than this. Black Consciousness ideas were important among those involved in the historic Soweto school students' revolt in 1976.

Mandela himself said Biko was "the spark that lit a fire across South Africa".

The apartheid state murdered Biko in 1977 when he was just 30 years old.

But groups of activists, disillusioned by the ANC government's corruption and failure to bring change, are today re-examining his ideas.

Biko was born into a poor family in Eastern Cape. His father was a policeman and then a clerk, his mother a domestic worker for white families.

His childhood coincided with the strict formalisation of apartheid. It denied black people all political and most economic rights.

It classified them through humiliating racial tests, told them where they could live, and beat, jailed or killed them if they resisted.

Whites, one in seven of the population, ruled the country.

Biko came into prominence as the first president of the South African Student Organisation (Saso) in the mid-1960s.

THE MOST important factor in beating apartheid was neither the ANC nor the Black Consciousness tradition but the militancy and power of black workers striking and resisting.

This was followed up by the banning of the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress.

It took great courage to stand out and urge a fightback. But it also meant there was space for new ideas.

A central issue for Saso was whether black students should organise separately from whites, and particularly white liberals.

The country's national student organisation, Nusas, was open to students of all racial categories. But despite its multiracial membership, it was largely controlled by white students. Biko wrote, "The role

STEVE BIKO

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND LIBERATION

Born 75 years ago this month, Steve Biko was one of South Africa's most important activists and thinkers. Yet he is barely mentioned in many histories. Charlie Kimber looks at Biko's life and politics

of the white liberal in the black man's history in South Africa is a curious one.

"Very few black organisations were not under white direction. True to their image, the white liberals always knew what was good for the blacks and told them so."

Saso in contrast restricted membership to all black sections of the population, which included those sorted into the apartheid categories of "African", "Coloured" and "Indian".

Its roots lay in Africanism, an ideology that developed around figures such as Anton Lembede

The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed

call for "black power" and Malcolm X's demand to use "any means necessary" was particularly important.

Black Consciousness activists also borrowed from the writings of Frantz Fanon. "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed," Biko said.

He wanted black people to gain pride and not feel they had to back off. It was necessary to destroy the prevailing notion that "black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white."

BIKO popularised the slogan "black is beautiful". But he insisted, "I must state categorically that there is no such thing as black policeman.

"Any black man who props up the system actively has lost the right to be considered part of the black world. They are the extension of the enemy into our ranks."

Being black meant recognising the source of oppression and having the will to smash it.

The great strength of Biko's ideas was that they tapped into the rising sense of militancy in the 1970s.

This was shown by the Durban strikes of 1973—the beginning of workers' resistance at a time when there were no legal trade unions. This affected black consciousness.

The language describing the enemy shifted from the "white power structure" to the "white capitalist regime" and "racial capitalism".

And then came the Soweto rebellion. Biko's fearless defiance and self-reliance fitted. You didn't have to wait for a group of exiled ANC political figures to fight.

The government had initially thought Black Consciousness might fit with its racial categorisation.

But it soon learned it was a danger, and turned to repression. Biko was first banned from political activity and then involved in a trial of Black Consciousness members.

His quick-witted and pugnacious appearance in court for a week gripped the country. His friend Ben Khoapa said, "Overnight, Steve became the toast of the Soweto shebeens [drinking halls]. Here at last was the authentic voice of the people, not afraid to say openly what other blacks think but are too frightened to say."

But there were weaknesses in Biko's ideas. There was little direction or discussion of what forces could break the regime.

More time was put into local self-help projects—building clinics and schools and trying to boost black businesses—than into organising workers.

The Africanists had been strongly anti-Communist, seeing Marxist ideas as a diversion from black unity. This wasn't quite Biko's position. He said, "Any form of political freedom

which doesn't touch on the proper distribution of wealth will be meaningless.

"If we have a mere change of face of those in governing positions, what is likely to happen is that black people will continue to be poor, and you will see a few blacks filtering through into the so-called bourgeoisie.

"Our society will be run almost as of yesterday." That's quite a good prophecy about what has happened since 1994.

But at the same time Biko did not see the class struggle as central to smashing racism, or the systemic intertwining of racism and capitalism.

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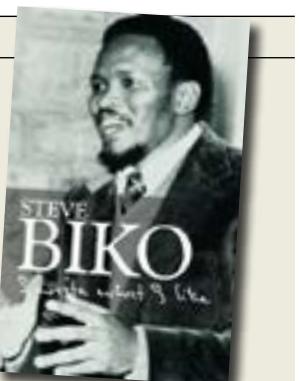
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READ MORE

- [I Write What I Like](#) by Steve Biko
- [Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Schoolchildren's Revolt that Shocked Apartheid](#) by Baruch Hurson
- [Black Consciousness in South Africa](#) by Robert Fatton

Available at Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop. Phone 020 7637 1848 or go to www.bookmarksbookshop.co.uk



FOCUS ON CHRISTMAS

What does the 'joyous spirit of Christmas' mean for the right?

The ghost of Christmas future is worrying the Tories and the bosses. **Yuri Prasad** investigates what they are defending

A BIT like the "War on Terror" and the "War on Drugs", the "Fight to Save Christmas" is unending and bends constantly to encompass new dangers.

It wasn't long ago that the main threat to this year's seasonal festivities was a crisis in the toy supply chain and a possible shortage of turkeys.

That all feels like a long time ago.

Now, the Sun newspaper warns us that the potentially more dangerous Omicron virus variant could wreck the holiday period.

"Three weeks to save Christmas," it screamed last week as it told readers of the government's limited Covid protection measures.

Of course, Covid is a serious business but in the minds of the right there are even greater threats to the most joyous time of year.

Now, that might sound a bit "un-Christian", but for the right Christianity is at the very centre of things.

Blob

"Now the woke 'blob' tries to ban Christmas,"

proclaimed the Daily Mail.

This came after somebody in the Cabinet Office thought that as a significant proportion of Britain aren't Christian, its advertising ought to reflect that.

Why do the Tories and their acolytes get so worked up about Winter?

Part of the reason is surely cold, hard cash.

There is no finer sound in the Tory ear than a thousand cash registers singing in unison.

With an economy that has long been centred on the service sector, rather than manufacturing, the festive period spending spree keeps the wheels of commerce turning.

Many restaurants report that without Christmas they would be bust.

And the whole hospitality industry is crying that the new variant is going to lay waste to their office party

of three days of food gorges, to the buying and wrapping of presents, the jobs naturally suit the more "family orientated" gender, they insist.

And, when it comes to the big day itself, of course it's mainly women that get up early to make a start on that all important dinner.

That the right see threats to their most precious of times coming from every direction is symptomatic of the age of "culture wars".

But for millions of people the understanding of Christmas may be simpler but is no less ideological.

In the era of neoliberalism the patterns of our working lives have been increasingly torn up.

Weekend working, including on Sunday, is now commonplace.

The TUC union federation estimates that workers in Britain clocked up £24 billion worth of unpaid overtime last year.

The need to respond immediately to work emails long into the night blights the rest and sleep of thousands of people.

The feeling that the demands of work force us to neglect our partners, families and friends hangs over us.

That there is this time, Christmas, during which everything seems to stop, if only for a few days, comes as a moment of light relief to cherish.

That's the bit about Christmas that the right don't like.

There is no finer sound in the Tory ear than a thousand cash registers ringing in unison

Royal family's reign in Barbados comes to an end

Barbados has been declared a republic. Sam Ord spoke to an activist there about what this means and what the next battles are likely to be

BARBADOS has formally separated with the British royal family after 396 years of colonial reign. Queen Elizabeth is no longer the country's head of state, with Barbados being declared a republic.

On 12 October, former governor general Sandra Mason was jointly nominated by prime minister Mia Mottley and leader of the opposition as candidate for the first president of Barbados.

She was elected on 20 October and took office on 30 November.

Crowds gathered in the capital, Bridgetown, to watch the removal of the Royal Standard flag from Heroes Square. Celebrations included dancing, music and fireworks.

Barbados' new president Mason addressed the celebrations, saying, "The time has come to fully leave our colonial past behind," despite the attendance of Prince Charles.

Johnathan Cumberbatch is an anti-colonial activist in Barbados. He told Socialist Worker, "I have a feeling of jubilation—especially after the ceremonies.

Overdue

"The time was long overdue to end being a British Commonwealth realm."

British rule of Barbados began in the 1620s. In the name of the British Empire, settlers transformed the island into a sugar producing slave colony.

The eventual end of slavery across the bloody empire was won in 1834 through a series of slave rebellions.

In Barbados some 400 slaves rose up against their colonial masters in the 1816 Bussa Rebellion—nine years after the slave trade had

been abolished. Around 50 enslaved people died in battle and 70 were executed. Another 300 were taken to Bridgetown for trial, of which 144 were executed and 132 sent away to another island.

The revolt led to two more uprisings to end slavery in British colonised Caribbean islands in Jamaica and Guyana.

Johnathan views Barbados' new status as a republic as a great step forward. But he thinks the legacy of colonialism still has a major impact across the Caribbean.

"The issues left vary from country to country," he explained. "The biggest issues that are facing Barbados relate to debt and public health. "The public health aspect would relate to the high incidence of certain diseases among the local population.

"It is a direct legacy from the poor nutrition that was carried out during colonialism."

Cutting ties with the royal family and the British Empire has given Barbadians hope for a fresh start.

But Johnathan warns that the new republican state isn't the end of the fight.

"People need to be wary of imperialism of all forms," he said. "The move to republican status is a mixed bag of emotions. I have a feeling of jubilation but also the realisation that hard work begins anew."

Johnathan argued the class divide in Barbados is widening, meaning workers' fights must continue to challenge this.

He added, "Parliament has been used as a tool of oppression and exploitation, now it's a tool of liberation."

And he emphasised workers needing to "assert their rights".

For socialists this has to mean building class unity and pushing for strikes to win change, rather than waiting for parliamentary reforms.

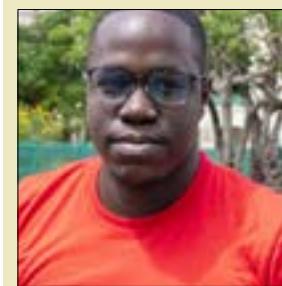
Can reparations win justice?

ANTI-racists in Barbados and Britain are also fighting for reparations as justice for the horrors of empire.

Dorset Stand Up To Racism has been campaigning for the Drax family who built their fortune through slavery in Barbados to hand their estate to the people of Barbados.

Johnathan believes reparations "would go a long way to helping us fix some systemic issues left by colonialism.

"Reparations would



Activist Johnathan

include things like technology transfers, a full apology for the acts committed and educational aid," he added. "Technology could be particularly useful in the fight against climate change."

Reparations are an attempt to make up for the bloody past of slavery.

But resulting racial inequalities won't all disappear with a package of reforms or apologies.

Racism is structural, so the solutions of reparations won't be able to overcome class or racial divisions. True liberation has to be won by oppressed people fighting from below.

New republic won't cut ties with Britain or the Commonwealth

IN 1966 Barbados declared independence five years after full internal self-government.

The Democratic Labour Party (DLP) was elected. It was the more left wing of two social democratic parties.

The Barbados Labour Party (BLP) had been founded in 1938. Politicians who wanted swifter moves to independence broke off from the BLP and founded the DLP in 1955.

DLP leader Errol Barrow became the country's first prime minister.

Independence meant the queen ceased to have sovereignty over Barbados, but the island chose to remain a constitutional monarchy.

The monarch was represented locally by a governor-general—elected by the Queen on advice of the prime minister.

Barbados' parliament—split between the 30

seat House of Assembly and 21 seat Senate—is dominated by the BLP.

The BLP, despite fighting for a republic, doesn't want a complete break from Britain.

Although ceasing to have the queen as head of state, Barbados will remain part of the Commonwealth made up of former colonial territories.

The removal of the queen as head of state hasn't been done by an insurgent battle from

below. Mainstream politicians hope it will make them more popular and soothe dissent from the people.

But class issues in Barbados will remain.

Campaigners with the Caribbean Movement for Peace and Integration (CMPI) and the 13th June 1980 Group were forced by the government to cancel a protest against Prince Charles.

CMPI general secretary David Denny said, "We should not honour a

family who murdered and tortured our people."

Friendly ties to the royal family from the government show that just as in other countries, parliament doesn't represent the class interests of ordinary people.

And despite republican status the BLP wants to keep British influence on the island.

President of Barbados Sandra Mason even awarded Prince Charles the country's

highest honour.

Both of their speeches outlined how republicanism is a new possibility for relations to continue.

Charles' speech was acclaimed for simply acknowledging that slavery was a horror.

Republicanism is an important step in the fight for liberation.

But the upcoming fight requires more action from below to break colonial ties properly.

IN BRIEF

Scaffolders could build up dispute

THE UNITE union has threatened escalation in a strike by scaffolders in Scunthorpe.

Scaffolders employed by Actavo at British Steel in Scunthorpe have been striking for nine weeks against underpaying.

The 62 Unite members say their pay breaks a national agreement that sets fair rates.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham took to the picket lines last Wednesday. She tweeted, "We cannot allow national agreements to be ignored, both @Actavo_HQ & @BritishSteelUK must pay the rate for the job."

"We will escalate this dispute to make sure that workers get the rate."

Ballot for £15 at logistics firm

SOME 130 cask handlers, HGV, forklift, and shunter drivers employed by Carnyne Transport are balloting for strikes over pay.

Workers in the Unite union at at Glasgow-based logistics firm Springburn are demanding £15 an hour.

But bosses refuse to improve their just £13.72 an hour. The ballot is set to close on Wednesday of next week.

North Sea oil workers strike

AROUND 300 Unite union members working for Ponticelli UK Ltd and Semco Maritime Ltd are striking over cuts to terms and conditions.

Strikes were set to take place from Monday of this week until late February 2022.

Biomedical boffins battle in Blackburn and Burnley

BLACKBURN AND Burnley biomedical scientists have voted for a third strike beginning next Wednesday until 8 March.

The Unite union workers at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust are owed between £8,000 and £12,000. Two strikes have already taken place between 31 May and 28 July and 20 August and 11 November.

Cable workers won't wind up their fight

UNITE UNION members at Prysmian Cables in Wrexham are escalating their strikes after receiving no pay increase since 2019.

Workers have struck for six days of strikes since the beginning of November have taken place, and two 24 hour stoppages are scheduled for this week and next.

Plans are also being put in place for continuous strikes later this month.

SCHOOLS



STRIKERS AND supporters rally at Newham Sixth Form College

PICTURE: SOCIALIST WORKER

Strikers fight against academisation plan

by SAM ORD

TEACHERS AT Newham Sixth Form College (NewVic) in east London began strikes against academisation, bullying, restructuring and workload on Wednesday of last week.

Around 35 people joined a lively picket line including former staff, local residents and strikers from Oaks Park High School in the neighbouring borough of Redbridge.

NEU rep Rob Behan told Socialist Worker, "It's been very difficult to work throughout the pandemic, there's more pressure on staff than ever before.

"Over the last five years we've been doing more with less. We're trying to help students catch up, and government cuts are making the situation much worse.

"We want the college to immediately drop any prospect of academisation. We want to

be involved in negotiations, and not just be consulted about plans they have made."

Many strikers who wished to remain anonymous described a "culture of top down bullying".

"There's a lot of discriminatory practices that makes us jump through hoops," one said.

"Management usually gets new staff who aren't yet in the union to do their dirty work. This adds to the excessive workload and the mental health effects it has."

Striker J said, "Normally I just keep plodding on, but after Covid, back to back Zoom meetings and now this, I've had enough. Senior management have gone too far."

J argued that the college is vital for local people. "I'm fortunate to work alongside these people, they're inspirational," she said.

"Young local people are inspired by their teachers to

return to the school later in life to work"

Half of children in Newham live in households in poverty. Strikers say a non-academised school that enrols 2,500 young people, providing a wide range of opportunities, is important.

Around 15 staff members have joined the NEU after the dispute began. According to union reps, 90 percent of NewVic staff are now unionised.

The strike disrupted lots of lessons. But when teachers informed students about why they won't be working, they received lots of support and solidarity.

NEU president Daniel Kebede also gave solidarity to the pickets. He told Socialist Worker, "Workload, restructures and academisation—teachers don't deserve these things and if management doesn't listen to them there will be more action."

OBITUARY

Maggie Mariscotti
1944–2021

WE HAVE lost a close friend and comrade. Maggie Mariscotti died on 1 December at Whips Cross Hospital following a short illness.

We first met Maggie in the Walthamstow Miners Support Group during the 1984-5 strike. At that time, she was in the Labour Party.

Her fighting spirit brought her into conflict with the Labour leadership's opposition to the strike. Maggie came closer to us, buying Socialist Worker every week.

At the end of the year-long strike Maggie decided to join the SWP.

We persuaded her to come



Maggie, pictured in 1986

get this in the Labour Party." She thoroughly changed her mind about how to achieve socialism that year. She became immersed in the theory as well as the activity of revolutionary socialism.

Maggie's intense enthusiasm, energy and enquiring mind remained with her. A real fighter in her union, the NUJ, and for the working class.

Over the last few years Maggie became a carer for her mother and was not able to be as active as she would have liked.

Whenever she could she attended branch meetings, always searching for an upturn in struggle, always discussing the way forward. She will be sorely missed.

Roger Huddle

Preston teachers say bosses provoked dispute

WORKERS AT St Matthews Church of England Primary School in Preston began their first of five strike days this week as bosses pushed ahead with academisation plans.

Members of the NEU union struck on Tuesday and were set to strike again on Thursday of this week.

It comes after school management refused a meeting with NEU reps. NEU regional officer Jim Dye called on the governing body to resign for "provoking a dispute and refusing to

negotiate with us". The NEU wanted to meet with the governors over the proposals before they were finalised.

Governors offered a joint gathering with other teaching trade unions, which the NEU agreed to but still wanted a one-on-one discussion.

Management organised no meeting with any union before the plans were made permanent.

Further strikes were also set to go ahead on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of next week.

VICTIMISATION

Union rep sacked despite winning in disciplinary

BOSSES AT a school in Huddersfield have sacked a PE teacher and NEU union rep—despite a disciplinary hearing that ruled in her favour.

The NEU said Louise Lewis could return to school with "her head held high" after the disciplinary in April. She was suspended from her job in October last year, in what the NEU says was a victimisation.

Workers responded with a series of strikes at North Huddersfield Trust School, and won a disciplinary hearing that ruled in her

favour. But the school's senior leadership sacked her anyway, claiming to have "lost confidence" in her.

Huddersfield trades council hit back at the school. "It would be outrageous if the school had somehow overturned the governing body's decision last April," it said.

"I'm sure the local community and supportive trade unionists will be seeking immediate answers."

"We will, of course, be relaunching our campaign work to defend her."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Drivers vote for action

DRIVERS AND passenger assistants, who transport disabled children to and from school in Hackney, east London have voted 100 percent in favour of strikes.

Workers are striking after council bosses failed to pay a yearly lump sum of £381 in full. They also want the payment to be increased,

and are demanding a Covid hazard payment.

Alongside these issues workers also say bosses have failed to take necessary health and safety measures, including to provide proper toilet facilities.

Officials were set to begin talks with bosses as Socialist Worker went to press.

TRANSPORT



Five trade unions and the TUC protested outside parliament last week against attacks on Transport for London (TFL) workers. The TUC has demanded a raft of attacks on workers' conditions in return for a bailout of TFL

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

DISTRIBUTION

B&Q strikers say 4% is not enough

by JEANNIE ROBINSON

NEARLY 500 workers in the Unite union are continuing strikes and other action at the Wincanton B&Q depot in Worksop. They plan to strike for a week, then work to rule for a week, then repeat this pattern until 20 February.

Patrick McGrath, the Unite rep at the site, told Socialist Worker, "We are in this for the long haul.

Kingfisher, the parent company, is set to make £950 million this year. We want a fair pay rise.

"No one should be working full time and still be in poverty or visiting food banks. We turned down a 4 percent offer and are demanding a 6 percent rise or the RPI inflation rate—which is going up all the time."

Wincanton distributes the B&Q materials.

The strike is very solid following an 88 percent vote for action.

Every day there are 18 hours of picketing in three shifts. At the shift change up to 120 people have turned up to picket. A night shift, on

WINCANTON B&Q pickets are solid in Worksop

different pay levels, is continuing to work and some agency staff are going in.

But very little is being moved and deliveries into the warehouse have almost stopped because the site is running out of storage.

Every town has a B&Q so Unite Community members are working to bring this dispute to stores in the run up to Christmas.

Chesterfield trade council and Unite Community took solidarity to the picket line last week. Strikes are set to

begin again on Sunday.

During the next round of strikes, pickets plan to visit B&Q head office in Southampton, and the Wiltshire Wincanton HQ.

The company also tried to victimise the union rep by suddenly giving him notice of redundancy.

They offered him £38,000 to go. But as Pat said, "They realised their mistake when I reminded them it is against the law to offer inducements to trade union representatives."

■ TESCO WAREHOUSE and HGV drivers in Belfast and Antrim, Northern Ireland and Didcot and Doncaster in England are set to strike before Christmas.

Tesco offered workers a 4 percent pay rise—that's well below inflation.

The Northern Irish workers plan all-out strikes from next Thursday. Workers in Didcot and Doncaster are taking 48-hour stoppages also from next Thursday and will escalate to a five-day stoppage from Monday 20 December.

CLARKS

Clarks brought to heel as fire and rehire defeated

AN EIGHT-WEEK strike by Clarks shoes warehouse workers in Somerset has beaten a "fire and rehire" attempt by the firm's private equity owners.

The workers' battling spirit is an example to everyone. They were sustained by local trade union support and a 400-strong march.

Community union leaders made concessions during talks with the bosses brokered by the Acas mediation service.

But strikers overwhelmingly backed the deal because it meant they had beaten back attempts to cut their wages from £11.16 and hour to £9.50 an hour.

And workers already on a new contract and a reduced rate will get a 5.4 percent pay rise.

"It's a massive relief,"

said one striker. "We stood firm despite all the worry about striking for so long and the uncertainty over whether Clarks' new owners would just close out operation. We have come out of this so much stronger."

However, the standstill in pay means that workers face a pay cut in real terms this year.

■ STRIKES AT Panasonic Cardiff have been suspended by the GMB union.

The technology giant has offered workers a 5.5 percent wage increase over two years and a £300 annual bonus.

Workers will soon vote on the deal. They have fought bravely and beaten a pay freeze.

But the deal is still well below inflation and should be rejected.

FOOD WORKERS

Stop bosses at Weetabix

WEETABIX STRIKERS in Kettering and Corby in Northamptonshire are rebelling for further strikes against their bosses' fire and rehire attempt to cut their pay.

A consultative ballot on more action showed 69 percent in favour. Strikers are now returning to the factories and will be balloted in the coming weeks.

The strike started as 48-hour a week action, eventually upped to four days a week. To really hit the bosses the Unite union has to win the ballot and escalate to an all out strike.

Weetabix, owned by a giant multinational, cannot be allowed to succeed. The union has the finances to support the strikers, call protests and seek to spread the action.

● Donate to Unite East Midlands. Sort code: 60-83-01 Account number 20173975. Email messages of support to sean.kettle@unitetheunion.org

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Pay win in Glasgow?

A STRIKE by school janitors and cleaners in Glasgow was called off this week after bosses offered them a last minute pay deal.

Workers, who are members of the GMB union, are outsourced to Amey by Glasgow city council.

They were set to strike on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday this week.

Nearly 96 percent of workers had voted for strikes on a 69 percent turnout.

Now workers will vote on the new deal.

Initially Amey offered a rise of less than 1.5 percent.

There are reports that the strike threat has increased this to over six percent.

The best way forward would be to unite all the council disputes with more strikes by the cleansing workers.

They struck during Cop26 and have still not won their demands.

HEALTH WORKERS

Keep fighting over NHS pay

NURSES IN the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) have voted to say they are willing to strike and take action short of strike over pay.

The indicative ballot results, released last week, showed that 54 percent of members voting are prepared to walk out, while 89 percent back other forms of industrial action.

But turnout in the ballot was low—23 percent of eligible members voting in England, and 29 percent in Wales.

The interim chair of RCN council Carol Popplestone said, "Nursing staff do not consider industrial action lightly, but they will consider it if it means standing up for patients and their profession."

The next moves will be decided by the RCN trade union committee.

The turnout will disappoint many union activists as it doesn't reflect the anger on the wards.

The RCN leadership have wasted that feeling by following one indicative ballot with another, instead of harnessing the mood when the Pay Review Body reported earlier this year.

The long delay has sapped the energy of activists.

The union should now move to a formal industrial action ballot and throw absolutely everything into winning it with a good turnout.

And activists have to fight for a united fight across the health unions.

ENVIRONMENT

Extinction Rebellion protests in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

XR takes on the peddlers of poison in Huddersfield

EXTINCTION Rebellion supporters in Huddersfield protested on Thursday of last week against the Syngenta (formerly ICI) plant in the town which produces the deadly pesticide Paraquat.

It is so poisonous it is illegal to use in Britain and the European Union

but Syngenta exports it around the world. It has a devastating effect on nature and is also responsible for many human deaths.

The rally outside the station was followed by a march to the Syngenta works.

Martin Jones

ROUND-UP

THE UNITE union has launched a new search for evidence of collusion with blacklisting in the construction industry by officers of the union and its predecessors.

A panel of lay members with personal experience of blacklisting will now oversee the gathering of evidence to be fed into an already existing inquiry.

The panel is made up of Dave Smith, chair of the Blacklist Support Group and the two Unite executive council members for the construction sector, blacklisted electrician Frank Morris and Tony Seaman.

Dave Smith said, "The Blacklist Support Group applauds this announcement."

Anyone who has evidence of union officers from Unite or its predecessor unions colluding in the blacklisting of construction

workers is asked to email to blacklistingInquiry@thompsons.law.co.uk.

■ AFTER A week long strike, Stagecoach bus workers in South Yorkshire returned to work for one week. They will come out on strike again for another week starting next weekend.

Pickets were constantly very angry at the way management tried to make the current offer look much better than it really is.

George Arthur

■ STAND UP To Racism activists from east and south east London took to the bridge above the Blackwall Tunnel on Sunday to show solidarity with refugees.

It was an answer to far right activists who draped anti-refugee banners in the same place earlier in the week.



PICKET LINE outside King's College London university on the first day of strikes

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

ESCALATE ACTION AFTER UNI STRIKES

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

SOME 50,000 university workers struck for three days last week across Britain for better pay, conditions, against inequalities and to stop huge cuts to their pensions.

Now, activists in the UCU union must push for escalation.

In many universities there were buoyant picket lines and widespread solidarity from students. On Friday around 2,000 workers marched through the streets of central London.

There were also rallies and protests in Leeds, Manchester, Brighton and other cities and towns.

At a picket line in central London Tanya, UCU president at Birkbeck university, told Socialist Worker that workers are under "enormous pressure".

"In the last two years through the pandemic we've worked harder than ever before," she said. "We are asking for our jobs to be

sustainable. We're asking for better pay and a reasonable workload. And we are asking that we don't have our pensions slashed."

Tanya added that half of the staff at the university are on casual contracts. "Even those on full time contracts are reporting that they have to work an extra 20 or 30 hours a week just to keep up," she explained.

Allison, a researcher at nearby UCL university in London, is on a permanent contract. But said she was striking for her colleagues on casual ones.

"This entire sector is built on casualised staff," she explained. "This is bad for them, it's bad for full time staff and students alike."

Supporting local disputes is also important for building a more powerful and more effective national dispute.

Workers at Goldsmiths university began a 15-day strike on Tuesday 23 November against bosses' plans to axe 52 jobs. Students and workers from Goldsmiths



Strikers at UCL university in central London

It showed there was a real mood to fight back

strikes was essential. Roddy, a UCU member at Imperial College London, told Socialist Worker, "Employers need to know that we won't stop."

"They sold us short after the 2019 strike, then we were stopped by the pandemic, now we're back."

"In the New Year, we need a serious and large-scale fight and to escalate to indefinite action."

Blunt

Some at the top of the UCU, including its general secretary Jo Grady, have sought to blunt the strikes.

Last month Grady proposed a more limited set of strikes before Christmas. Members hit back at the plan forcing Grady to concede to three days for strikes.

This was a victory for organisation among rank and file union members. It also showed there was a real mood to fight back.

Now ordinary members need to ensure there is no rescheduling of the work that was stopped last week. Union

leaders have opened the door to management pressure on this issue by failing to give the correct instructions around action, such as on marking and rearranging lessons.

The strikes this week were a brilliant show of force for the UCU and a warning to the bosses.

But three days here and there in the upcoming spring term will not win this dispute.

As well as the 58 institutions that struck last week, another 42 are reballoting after missing the turnout requirements under the Tory anti-union laws.

Those ballots close on 14 January.

That means there could be 100 universities out in the new year. But university managements will try to hold firm, and the Tories will stand behind them.

It's time to move to more hard-hitting action and push from the base of the union to try to win an all-out strike.

And other unions must stand alongside this action.